

2020 LOCKDOWN AGAPE SERVICE

(with thanks to Susan Gilchrist for extracts from 'Sibyls Agape Service' and Wild Goose Publications for extracts from 'An Agape Iona Abbey' (from 'The Iona Abbey Worship Book') and <https://thebillabong.info/lectionary/ideas-for-lent-and-easter/an-agape-for-easter/>) Liturgy adapted from the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER USA ECUMENICAL / INTERFAITH NETWORK <https://www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org/prayer-resources> Edited and compiled by the Rev'd Canon Imogen Nay March 2020 Further edited by Rev'd Jokey Poyntz

Introduction:

AGAPE MEALS IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Agape feast (also called Love feast) was a loosely structured early Christian service that typically included a social fellowship meal. Because food was often eaten, it is often presumed to have a connection with the liturgical Eucharist. If indeed connected, it was separated from the Eucharist by the early second century, when Pliny the Younger reported that the Christians regularly met "on a stated day" in the early morning to "address a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity", and later in the day would "reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal". Neither Scripture nor any documents of the early church ever equate the Agape with the Eucharist and any putative relationship between them had virtually ceased by the time of Cyprian (died 258). Early canons of the church restricted the social meals of Agapes from being given in church sanctuaries. The prominence of the Agape in the church Fathers suggests that this informal service was second in church life only to the devotional Lord's Supper. An Agape Meal is a very happy way for Christians to enjoy each other's company!

This Fellowship Meal not only goes back to the early days of the church (believed to date between 50 and 120 A.D. and recorded in the Didache), it was brought into the church from the parent-faith, Judaism. The meals enjoyed by Jewish religious fraternities, the meals described in the Gospel stories, the meals in Jewish homes today on Sabbath Eve or Festival, records in early Christian writings all help us

to understand what an Agape is. In modern times the Agape was revived by the Moravians, and through them by the Methodists, and also by early Evangelicals under the name “Love-Feast”.⁴

Such meals could be held in the evening, like the Jewish ‘shabbat’ meal when the candle-lighting takes on a special significance if it is literally dark outside... There is another kind of darkness around us, but the light of Christ will still overcome it! Some of us may be living with our families so can celebrate together, but many, like me, will be unable to get together with our loved ones in person. I believe that Jesus’ words about ‘when two or three are gathered together’ will cover us too when we take part in this gathering virtually. This service is designed to be shared out amongst all who are gathered – including children!

THE MEAL – *get together some suitable food...here are some examples:*

The Agape, using oatcakes, water or, according to the occasion, something else special such as various kinds of bread and biscuits, cheeses, hardboiled eggs, fish in sandwiches, fruit (grapes, olives, apples), honey, bread, wine, juice etc... is sacramental in the sense that every shared meal, and every aspect of our life as God’s children, on God’s good earth, can be called sacramental. It is a service that can be led by lay people. So, it is also a celebration of the ministry of the whole people of God. That’s you and me.

Have ready the food, drink, a candle and a cross.

1. Speaker: Jesus Said: "Where two or three come together
in My name, there am I with them."

Matthew 18:20 (New International Version)

CALL TO THE LOVE FEAST (AGAPE MEAL)

2. Speaker: Out of darkness came light

All: And the power of God was revealed in the running
wave and the flowing air,
in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

3. Speaker: Out of the dust came life;

All: And the image of God was revealed in the human face
and the gentle heart,
in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul

4. Speaker: Out of justice came freedom;

All: And the wisdom of God was revealed
in the need to grow and the will to love,
in the chance to know and the power to choose.

5. Speaker: And God looked at the creation,

All: And Behold, it was very good.

6. *Speaker:* ‘I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.’ *Psalms 34:1*

PRAYER OF ADORATION

All: I will keep on thanking God
With constant words of prayer.
I will glory in the living God:
The humble will hear and be glad.

7. *Speaker:* Let us pray.

Living God, our loving parent; you cherish your creation and
We praise you
With earth, air, water, fire: in our element as your children,
We praise you..
With our lips, with our lives, in all our diversity, each one
made in your image,
We praise you.
Because, in Jesus, you came to share our human lives, our
sorrow and joy,
We praise you.
Because your Spirit is at work today: encouraging, enabling,
surprising us,
We praise you. Poor as we are, you give us hope:
Salt of the earth, you give us meaning and purpose and
We praise you.
All: Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (cf. Mark 9.50)

8. Reader : Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness,
how can you season it?

All: Giving God, you blessed us with saltiness,
But we became bland.

9. Reader: You trusted us with your Word,

All: But we did not keep it.

10. Reader: You lit a flame in our midst,

All: But we hid it under formality,
Smothered it with our fears.

11. Reader: God, in your mercy:

All: Forgive us.

(silence)

12. Reader: Forgiving God, we believe that you have called
us

All: To be salt and light;

13. Reader: That you offer us time and space and strength

All: To begin again.

(silence)

14.Reader: Giving and forgiving God,

All. We thank you.

15.Reader: Have salt in yourself and be at peace with one another.

All: AMEN

Jesus Said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12 (New International Version)

Light the candle. Others joining virtually should light their candles at the same time.

Each householder says: You are welcome to this house.

May the Lord give us a happy time together.

Let us offer a prayer over the candle.

16.Reader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

17.Reader: We give thanks to God for light:

the light that shines from the candle, sign of Christ our

Risen Lord: the light we give each other as we share our joy, our trust, our hope.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

The Peace

18.**Reader:** Lord we thank you
That through Your death and resurrection, mercy and
truth have met together
Justice and peace have kissed each other
So we may live together in love
Jesus said: “My Peace I Give You”
Let us offer each other a sign of peace

The Peace is shared

We say “Peace be with you” and reply “and also with you”

INTRODUCTION TO SHARING THE FEAST

19. **Reader:** At our tables we come as brothers and sisters
in the Holy Family of God. Taste and see that God is
good.

The Sharing

Be present, be present, Lord Jesus,
as you were in the midst of your disciples;
and make yourself known to us as we share this food together:
for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. **All: Amen.**

We “break bread” – share our food and drink together

Afterwards, we give thanks:

PRAYER

20.**Reader:** We thank you, God, for our daily bread for the food which delights and nourishes us and for the companionship that sustains us.

We thank you, too, for drink to quench our thirst and for the Living Water with which you surprise and enrich and transform our lives.

All: Amen.

(This can be followed by the Lord's Prayer, in our own languages and traditions)

**All: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are Yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Sending out

Blessing

21.***Speaker:*** Loving God, bless all who have gathered
round our table (whether literally with us or virtually!)
God bless each of us and in our times of need
may we find a table spread in the wilderness
and companions along the way.
May we know the fullness of Your presence
at every meal and in all our sharing. ***All: Amen.***

Jesus is risen! ***All: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

Epilogue

Sister Margaret Basso, a spiritual retreat leader, once said, "When the bread is broken open for us, that is Eucharist. When we break ourselves open to each other, that is also Eucharist."

"Perhaps that is why something remarkable happens when people sit down to eat together. We share food and conversation. We become a part of each other's lives. We break ourselves open to one another". May this be true for all of us.

